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Research Memorandum  
RSB-153, September 11, 1962

TO : The Secretary  
THROUGH: S/S  
FROM : DIR - Roger Hilsman

SUBJECT: Moscow Warns US on Cuba; Dampens Pressure on Berlin

Following is our analysis of the September 11 Tass statement on Cuba and Berlin.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Coming at the time of massive deliveries of military equipment to Cuba, the Soviet statement represents a step beyond Moscow's previous commitments to defend Cuba against "aggression", though it falls short of the explicit commitments contained in Soviet alliances with Bloc countries.

2. Moscow's immediate purpose is undoubtedly to cover a whole range of potential actions against Castro by the US alone or in coordination with other Latin American countries. At the same time, after 3 assurances that no military attack is planned, Moscow probably hopes that it will have another opportunity to claim (as it did at the time of Sucre and the offshore island crises) that its warnings forestalled "imperialist aggression."

3. Moscow is intent on stressing the defensive nature of its military support for Cuba as well as the adequacy of Soviet military capabilities without use of Cuba as a base.

4. While stressing Soviet "right" to support Cuba and to build a presence there, Moscow seeks to dampen down the crisis atmosphere over Berlin by indicating readiness to defer pressures for a "settlement" until November. This move may stem from a desire not to provoke a violent US reaction in the face of two simultaneous Soviet assaults on US interests. It might be also designed to leave an inference that US acquiescence in the Cuban developments might elicit Soviet restraint in Berlin.

5. Current indications, meanwhile, point to November as the threshold for some new Soviet initiative on Berlin possibly involving a move toward a Khrushchev-Kennedy meeting and a combination of new negotiating proposals and military threats.

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REVIEWED BY Moskowitz 12/12/62

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The charges of US aggressive intent against Cuba are geared to the President's request for Congressional authorization to call up 150,000 reserves, a move Moscow asserts it cannot overlook even though it had been inclined to view previous "provocative clamor" against Cuba as connected with the Congressional elections. The statement asserts, incorrectly, that the President requested this authorization "in connection with the strengthening of the armed forces in Cuba." TASS reviews in rather lurid terms -- starving of women and children -- alleged US efforts to bring down the Castro regime by economic blockade, and states that after failure of these measures the US now wants to intervene in "little heroic Cuba" as it did in the Soviet Union in 1919. Moscow asserts that in the light of this situation it had no choice but to render Cuba assistance, although the statement stresses the purely defensive nature of the Soviet arms assistance and downplays it by emphasis on the assertedly large volume of economic assistance (and experts) now arriving in Cuba.

Soviet warnings to the US are sprinkled throughout the statement. Moscow asserts that it has the capability to render support from its own territory — a reference to Soviet missile prowess — to any peace-loving state, not only Cuba, that asks for it in case of attack, and that the "Soviet Union will render such assistance just as it was ready in 1956 to render military assistance to Egypt at the time of the Anglo-French-Israeli aggression in the Suez Canal region." In the light of the alleged US aggressive plans against Cuba, attention is drawn to the fact that "one cannot attack Cuba and expect that the aggressor will be free from punishment for this attack. If this attack is made, this will be the beginning of the unleashing of war." In conclusion, the statement announces that while Moscow is taking no retaliatory action similar to the US callup of 150,000 reserves (whose military significance in the nuclear age it questions) the Soviet Defense Minister has been instructed "to take all measures to raise our armed forces to the peak of military preparedness." It stresses the need for preparedness "especially of the submarine fleet."

Moscow's Purposes. The Soviet warning to the US and promises of support for Cuba came two weeks after President Kennedy publicly announced that the US had no intention of invading Cuba and one week after he stressed the US view that Soviet weapons being sent to Cuba are defensive in character. Thus Moscow seems to be using its long-standing device of offering to fight when it has been given assurances that it will not have to. Khrushchev's promise of support for Communist China last June after the President and the US Ambassador in Warsaw had reassured Peking and the world at large of US intentions are illustrative in this respect.

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Moreover, should no US move against Cuba take place, Moscow can and will claim to have squelched another "imperialist aggression." Interesting in this connection is the statement's reference to the Soviet stand at the time of the 1956 Suez crisis. Moscow has consistently hailed its position at that time as responsible for halting the attack on Egypt though whether Moscow was in fact ready to intervene is questionable. The statement thus attempts to place the US in the seeming position of having abandoned designs against Cuba because of Soviet warnings.

The Soviet statement probably had the immediate purpose of forestalling various possible moves by the US, alone or in conjunction with other Latin American states, against Cuba. Moscow has taken note of virtually every demand voiced in various US quarters for further punitive action against the Cuban regime, and may well feel that the US Government, in the light of the Soviet military buildup in Cuba and under mounting public pressure, might undertake action against the Cuban regime. The Soviet warnings are designed to forestall any such action, as well as to psychologically reassure the Castro regime.

Soviet Commitment. The general promises of support for Cuba commit the Soviet Union to no concrete course of action in defending the Castro regime and do not carry the implications of automatic assistance such as are embodied in Soviet alliance treaties. However, coming in the wake of a publicly acknowledged Soviet military buildup in Cuba, of Moscow's assertion of its "right" to assist Cuban defense efforts, and of charges of US aggressive designs on Cuba, reiteration of general promises of support strongly involves Soviet prestige in the fortunes of the Castro regime and thus heightens the Soviet commitment to render assistance should that regime need it.

Berlin. The warnings and the insistence on the USSR's "right" to protect Cuba are in part offset by Moscow's apparent readiness to wait out the US elections in November before insisting on further negotiations on Germany. Action on a peace treaty, though not necessarily in Berlin itself, is thus postponed again until additional negotiations have taken place. This would seem to push the next potential deadline, if any, for a peace treaty into 1963. It may also prove to be significant that the statement includes no threat of a separate peace treaty with East Germany should negotiations fail.

The TASS statement's final paragraphs outlining the Soviet position on Berlin repeat the usual Soviet insistence that the occupation regime in West Berlin must be eliminated but a "German peace treaty" is the only method mentioned for accomplishing this. Furthermore, all reference to bilateral negotiations are linked exclusively to the subject of a peace treaty, which seemingly excludes consideration of an interim Berlin settlement or ~~anything~~ 0 3 short of a treaty. There is, however, a hint of possible modification of the usual Soviet negotiating position in the phrase "the Soviet

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Government as before stands for the earliest conclusion of a German peace treaty and adjustment of the situation in West Berlin on this basis." The moderation of this formulation (the words "solution," "settlement," or "normalization" are customarily used) contrasts oddly with the belligerency and bombast of the rest of the statement.

Significance of the November Date. The decision to relax pressure for a Berlin "settlement" until the November elections supplements a growing list of recent references to November in Soviet/GDR planning on Berlin. (There were, however, intelligence reports as early as April indicating that the Soviets estimated President Kennedy would be unable to negotiate seriously on Berlin until the 1962 congressional elections were out of the way.) There have been several reports -- including the most recent GDR defector comments -- that operational plans for the Soviet and GDR armed forces in Germany, plans seemingly geared to a Berlin move, are scheduled for completion in November. Ambassador Dobrynin's comments to Ambassador Stevenson that Khrushchev would not appear at the UN "before mid-November" -- if he came -- would also seem to fit into this pattern.

Although the specific thrust of Soviet intentions still remain unclear, it would seem that some new Soviet initiative on Berlin is to come in November or thereabouts, possibly involving an effort to secure a summit meeting between Khrushchev and President Kennedy.

Berlin-Cuba Link. The Soviet statement is Moscow's first overt move to establish a direct link between the Berlin and Cuban crises. The explicit way in which this link is established is by stressing Soviet peaceful goals in both Cuba and Berlin and by demanding a reasonable US attitude on both. By implication it is established (actually reaffirmed) through Moscow's emphasis of its military prowess which permits it to repulse "aggression" wherever it occurs.

On a more subtle level, however, the statement suggests that Moscow is aware that a drastic heightening of tension simultaneously in Berlin and Cuba may lead to US reactions (especially in the atmosphere of an election campaign) whose consequences might be difficult to control. Thus, while Moscow does not foreclose further encroachments in Berlin and certainly does not tie its hands concerning responses to Western moves curtailing the Soviet presence in West Berlin, it does appear to be signaling a willingness to let the Berlin situation simmer rather than burn brightly for the time being. Moreover, Moscow may want to leave the inference that US acquiescence in the close Soviet-Cuban relationship (which in its military aspect is said to have solely defensive purposes) and in the existence of the Castro regime might elicit Soviet restraint in Berlin.

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